


## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

	<h3>COMMUNICATIONS</h3> <p><b>Policy Number:</b> 2.01</p> <p><b>Policy Title:</b> Media Relations</p> <p><b>Effective Date:</b> January 1, 2004</p>
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### Purpose:

1. To provide useful and accurate information in a timely and professional manner regarding City business, service.
2. To present information in a manner that is consistent with Woodinville City Council's policies and philosophies.
3. To assure as much as possible that consistent information is being disseminated by the organization.
4. To ensure that the City Council, staff, media and general public are aware of any communications issues.
5. To use the media as a resource, particularly in emergency, disaster or crisis situations.
6. To foster a cooperative working relationship between the City of Woodinville and the media.
7. To establish procedures for responding to media inquiries, including identifying a City spokesperson.
8. To clarify the difference between being a spokesperson on behalf of the City of Woodinville and the expression of individual opinions of elected and appointed officials about politics and policy development.

### Goal:

To the best of its ability, the City of Woodinville will ensure the accurate and prompt exchange of information with the news media in accordance with this policy.

### Scope:

This policy applies to all City staff, Woodinville City Council and appointed members of the City advisory boards.

## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

### Definitions:

**City staff** is defined as regular, non-regular, contract employees of the City of Woodinville and City volunteers, excluding elected and appointed officials.

**City Spokesperson** is defined as the person most knowledgeable and informed about a particular subject matter. In the event of a televised news conference, the spokesperson may be the Mayor or City Councilmembers, the City Manager, Communications Coordinator, Assistant to the City Manager or the Department Directors for the core city departments.

**City Public Information Officer (PIO)** is the person who oversees the coordination of media relations via print, television, radio and other media outlets regarding City issues, events and information. The PIO is the Communications Coordinator. In the absence of the Communications Coordinator, the Assistant to the City Manager serves as the PIO. If both the Communications Coordinator and Assistant to the City Manager are absent, the City Manager serves as the PIO.

**Guideline:** is a term for purposes of this policy to mean a statement or other indication of policy or procedure by which to determine a course of action.

**News Release** is information prepared for dissemination to the news media, reproduced on letterhead identifying the City of Woodinville as the source. A news release should be timely and complete.

**News Conference** is a scheduled media gathering, planned by the Public Information Officer or designee when an emergency, announcement or other significant information must be disseminated in a timely, coordinated manner to multiple media outlets.

**News Briefings** are an opportunity for the City spokesperson to grant interviews with media representatives on an individual basis. Typically news briefings provide an opportunity for in-depth questioning by the media.

**Non-routine Media Requests** typically involve responses that require interpretation of policy, involve employee information or are in response to an emergency situation or a controversial issue.

**“Not for attribution”** is a media relations term that refers to the desire of the person providing information to a media source to not have the information attributed to the person providing it. See “Off the Record”

**“On Background”** is a media relations term that refers to the person providing information that creates an understandable context for the media person with the understanding that it will not be used in the story.

**“Off the Record”** is a media relations term that refers to the person providing information does so with the perception that the information will not be used in a public news story. See “Not for Attribution.”

**Routine Media Requests** typically involve responses that require information that is incidental or inconsequential in nature.

**Policy** as it typically refers to municipal government, is a plan or course of action intended to influence and determine decisions, actions, and other matters.

**Sensitive and Controversial Issues** as that term applies to this policy may include, but is not limited to:

## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

1. *Personnel issue related to any city employee, such as performance evaluation, reasons for termination, reasons for not hiring, harassment claims.*
2. *Legal claims or lawsuits filed against the City of Woodinville or any of its employees or agents,*
3. *Existing or potential threats to public safety, welfare or property.*
4. *Issues that may affect the City's public image or citizen confidence.*

### References:

Personnel Rules, Section 8.7.1

Administrative Policy 7.03.02: Email Policy

Administrative Policy 8.02: Disclosure of Public Records

Administrative Policy 2.02: Crisis Communications Plan (future)

### Policy:

The following procedures and standards will be used by all departments as applicable to media relations within the City of Woodinville.

- I. **Spokesperson.** In most cases there will be one spokesperson designated for response to each inquiry. For citywide inquiries, the spokesperson will most often be the City Manager or Public Information Officer (PIO). For department-related issues, the spokesperson will most often be the Department Director. The spokesperson will work directly with the PIO to ensure that information for specific media issues is communicated appropriately.
- II. **Primary City Contact.** The Communications Coordinator (PIO) will serve as the primary source of City information, providing background information about City issues, projects and services.
  - a) The Assistant to the City Manager serves as PIO in the absence of the Communications Coordinator.
  - b) The City Manager or appointed designee serves in the absence of the Communications Coordinator and Assistant to the City Manager
- III. **Priority attention** should be given to all media inquiries. Every effort should be made to meet media deadlines and ensure that all information released is accurate. Accuracy of information takes precedence over media deadlines.
  - a) If another priority prevents an immediate response, a courtesy call should be made to the reporter confirming what information is requested and advising when the requested information will be available.
- IV. **Routine media requests** may be responded to by any employee if the response is of a factual, incidental or inconsequential nature (i.e. special event schedule).
- V. **Non-routine media requests** should be forwarded the Public Information Officer prior to response. These may include responses that require the interpretation of policy, employee information and emergency situations.

## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

- a) Errors in reporting will be brought to the attention of the PIO.
- b) Staff will make every effort to have the PIO or designee present at all person-to-person interviews in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the staff, evaluate the interaction with media; and offer assistance to staff and media.

- VI. **Sensitive and controversial issues** often become headlines for the news media. This provision provides the framework for the City's public information staff to respond appropriately and as soon as possible to sensitive and controversial issues as described in Definition Section of this policy.

Sensitive and controversial issues pertaining to internal operations of the City organization should be immediately forwarded to the Public Information Officer or designee in order to prepare for or respond to media inquiries. The City Manager will communicate with the PIO, Department Directors and City officials as necessary, including the City Attorney, to develop appropriate strategies for each issue and determine an appropriate spokesperson.

- a) Any city employee (City staff) who speaks to a reporter or editor about a sensitive or controversial issue without authorization and prior approval by the City Manager may be subject to disciplinary action. The Public Information Officer must be made aware of any such authorization or approval.
- b) Sensitive and controversial issues of interest to the media may be best assessed by asking the following:
  - i. *Is the issue a threat, existing or potential, to life, health, or property?*
  - ii. *Could the issue likely be interpreted to negatively affect public confidence in or opinion of the City of Woodinville government or City Council?*
  - iii. *Is the issue of particular interest to the general public?*
  - iv. *Are there legal ramifications, existing or potential, raised by the issue?*
  - v. *Has more than one member of the media inquired about the same issue?*
  - vi. *Has someone or some aspect of it threatened to go to the media about the issue?*
  - vii. *Is there unusual or inappropriate interest by a person or small group of people about a seemingly routine issue?*

- VII. **Public Records Requests** from the media or general public for details or other information related to a sensitive or controversial issue must be made in writing in accordance with the City's Request for Public Records (Administrative Policy No. 8.02). All public records requests will be forwarded to the City Clerk immediately upon receipt.

## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

- VIII. **News Releases** will be prepared and issued by the Public Information Officer (PIO) or designee as newsworthy information becomes available or as events occur.
- IX. **News Briefings** may be conducted to educate the news media about potentially controversial issues and provide reporters an opportunity to ask in-depth questions. In most briefings, the city provides extensive background materials, facts sheets and explanatory materials.
- a) The PIO will be responsible for scheduling any such briefings.

X. **Guidelines for Employees Acting as Private Citizens**

The following guidelines are offered employees who may choose to contact the media as a private citizen. These guidelines do not prohibit such contact but support other city policies deemed necessary by state and federal law regarding improper use of city equipment and property:

Activities prohibited by state law (RCW 42.17.130)

- A. Letters to the Editor may not be prepared on city time, printed on city letterhead stationery, or mailed at city expense.
- B. Telephone contact may not be made on city time using city telephones.
- C. Use of city email is prohibited. (Refer to Administrative Policy No. 7.03.02)
- D. Use of city facilities or supplies is prohibited.

Activities not prohibited by state law but encouraged per this policy:

- A. Responses or letters shall not include the employee's official title or imply that the response is on behalf of the City of Woodinville organization.
- B. Statements made to the media shall not disrupt public meetings or interfere with the City Manager or designee in carrying out the day-to-day management responsibilities of the City.
- C. These guidelines also apply to employees responding to or initiating media contact as official representatives of employee groups.

- XI. **News Conferences** will be held at the direction of the City Manager or Mayor (or designee/successor) to announce or respond to an issue of significance or controversy with a united voice pertaining to facts, information, rules, and emergency or crisis situation or the established policy/rules of the City.
- a) A news conference allows city officials to effectively respond at one sitting rather than responding individually to many media contacts.
  - b) A news conference enables city officials to address issues personally and conveys willingness to openly discuss an issue.
  - c) A news conference may be called when:

## ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

- i. The issue to be announced is best conveyed at a news conference.
  - ii. Major participants of a project are available to highlight their participation and respond to media inquiries “together.”
  - iii. The issue is likely to produce controversy.
    - d) News conferences will be planned in advance and coordinated by the PIO.
    - e) A spokesperson for the news conference will be selected by the City Manager, or if appropriate by circumstances, the Mayor.
  - i. If the issue is directly related to the employment of the City Manager, the Mayor will coordinate with the PIO for a News Conference.
    - f) Additional personnel may be required to attend who can provide background information and details.
- XII. **Emergency Media Relations.** In the event of a disaster or emergency that requires the Woodinville Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to be activated, the City PIO (or designee), Woodinville Fire & Life Safety District PIO (or designee) or King County Sheriff’s Office PIO (or designee) will be responsible for primary media relations.
  - a) Upon the Proclamation of a Local Emergency by the Woodinville City Council, the Mayor, Deputy Mayor or designee may conduct the first News Conference announcing such Proclamation.
  - b) The Policy Group will work with the City Manager and PIO to prepare for a news conference.
  - c) Contact with the media by elected officials shall be arranged by the City Manager and PIO.
- XIII. **Media Relations Training** required of management/supervisory staff at least once a year, with more intensive training provided on an “as needed” basis.

## Procedure: Responding to Media Inquiries

- 1. **City Employee Responsibilities and Guidelines**
  - a. It is the responsibility of employees to immediately notify their supervisor or Department Director of significant events or issues that occur and may be of major interest to the general public.
  - b. Employees may respond directly to a media inquiry regarding routine, factual information relating specifically to his/her function and information of inconsequential nature.
  - c. If the inquiry involves policy issues, the staff member may only respond after direction to do so from his/her Department Director and with the Director’s knowledge of the response.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES**

### **2. Department Director Responsibilities and Guidelines**

It is the responsibility of Department Directors to immediately notify the City Manager or PIO of significant events or issues that occur within their departments and may be of major interest to the general public. The City Manager will determine the appropriateness of contacting the City Council. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- A. Injury, termination, serious illness, or death of an employee
- B. Major malfunctions of city equipment, city facility or infrastructure that could impact the general welfare of the public, environment or ability to provide service.
- C. An unexpected work stoppage or inability to provide a critical city service.
- D. The arrest of an employee.
- E. Programs and employees receiving awards.

### **3. Responding to Media Inquiries.**

- A. Upon receiving a media inquiry that requires additional information the Communications Coordinator/PIO is unable to provide, the inquiry will be immediately forwarded to the appropriate Department Director.
  - 1. The Communications Coordinator/PIO will work with the Department Director to develop a simple strategy to properly respond.
  - 2. The Department Director may forward the inquiry to a staff member.
  - 3. No employee shall provide media interviews unless approved by the Department Director and PIO.

### **4. Media Contact Guidelines**

- A. Respond to inquiries within your purview. Do not respond to matters that do not directly relate to your professional responsibility for the City.
- B. Do not make judgmental comments; particularly about individual councilmembers, council actions or official city policy.
- C. Do not offer legal opinions on city policies or activities.
- D. Do not discuss employees or personnel actions.
- E. Do not speculate about what action the City will take.
- F. Media inquiries shall be responded to within 2 - 4 hours of receiving the request.
- G. Inquire of the story's focus, the reporter's deadline and story publication date.
- H. Administrative staff shall give priority to phone calls from reporters.

### **5. The PIO or designee will prepare news releases.**

- a) The City Manager has overall authority and responsibility for the dissemination of public information. The PIO will work with the City Manager as necessary when releasing information to the public and to the media.
- b) The City Manager shall review and approval all news releases prior to distribution.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES**

- c) The PIO shall maintain a media contact list.
- d) City news releases will be distributed to the City Council and staff.
- e) News releases shall contain contact information for the PIO and other City staff as designated.
- f) News releases shall be distributed electronically (email) and via facsimile to appropriate media (television, newsprint, radio).
- g) News releases shall be posted to the City's official website.
- h) Refer to Communications Procedures: "How to Create and Distribute a City News Release" and "How to Write a City News Release"

### **8. Editorial Responses from Staff**

The PIO will monitor the editorial column of local newspapers and if deemed necessary by the City Manager, forward them to the appropriate staff for response.

- A. Editorial responses shall be reviewed by the City Manager and PIO in advance. These may be shared in draft with the City Council representing or special to an active Council interest and shall be shared in final form with City Council prior to publication.
- B. "Letters to the Editor" may be submitted to clarify the City's position, educate readers about a city service, or express the City's gratitude to the community.

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Approved by:

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Date